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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

October 16, 2001

Magalie Roman Salas
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, Room CY-B402
Washington, DC 20554

Re: CC Docket No.: 01-277 /
Application by BellSouth Corporation for Authorization Under Section 271 of the
Communications Act to Provide In-Region, Interlata Services in the States of
Georgia and Louisiana

Dear Ms. Salas:

I am writing this letter in support of the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) approval of BellSouth's application to expand long-distance service options to consumers in Georgia and Louisiana. As the FCC is well aware, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is the nation's largest and strongest civil rights organization. *The NAACP's principal objective is to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of minority group citizens of United States and to eliminate race prejudice.* As such, it is clear that all consumers irrespective of where they work, study or reside should have access to affordable and robust telecommunications services.

Telephone consumers generally benefit when local telephone companies are permitted to compete in the long distance market. The Consumer Federation of America, for example, found that consumers in New York saved up to 20 % on local and long distance telephone service, a year after the local Bell company was allowed to offer long distance service. Similarly, the Telecommunications Research and Action Center found that New Yorkers saved nearly \$200 million. Certainly, consumers in Georgia and Louisiana -- many of whom are our members -- ought to have the same opportunity for substantial savings and competitive service as consumers in New York, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Of equal importance, are public and private efforts to reduce the discriminatory impact that the lack of access to advanced telecommunication services has on under-served rural and low-income urban areas -- where many racial and ethnic minorities work and reside. While broadband technologies are being deployed throughout the country, *the rate for the deployment of high-speed Internet access to under-served is far to low.* The very health, wealth and social prosperity of underserved communities are threatened. NAACP President Kweisi Mfume noted during a discussion on the gap between the digital haves and have-nots, "The technological segregation known as the digital divide must be narrowed."

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The Department of Commerce's comprehensive study, *Falling Through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion* showed that while minorities have increased Internet access, overall between 1994 and 2000, the technology chasm between blacks and whites is still formidable. Among other things, the Commerce Department found that as of December 2000: Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander descent were the most likely to have Internet access. Of that group, 56.8% had a Net connection at home. Some 46.1% of non-Hispanic whites had a home Internet account. ***Blacks and Hispanic Americans trailed both groups by a wide margin with only 23.5% and 23.6%, respectively, reporting a Net connection at home. Healthy competition contributes significantly in forging greater access to these new and necessary technological advancements.***

BellSouth has proven it's commitment to accelerated deployment of advanced telecommunications capability needed to improve the quality of life for all consumers. Approval of the Application will provide incentives to honor this pledge. I am convinced that approval of this application is consistent with the principles articulated in the *1999 NAACP Report on the Cable Industry*, "***There must be public policy to ensure that broadband deployment is timely, that the industry competes fairly, and that service is provided to all sectors and geographical locations of American society***".

Additionally, the FCC should approve this application, because it is in the public interest to enable a good corporate citizen to spur economic development and competition that will benefit racial and ethnic minority communities. Upgrading the network infrastructure and expanding the number of services offered to compete in long distance has the potential to create new jobs and business opportunities for African-American workers and businesses. BellSouth has a history of purchasing long distance advertising from African American as well as other minority-media and will continue this business practice. Additionally, BellSouth will likely continue to reach out to minority vendors for a number of other services.

BellSouth has proven that it is a friend to racial and ethnic minority communities, most notably in its hiring and contracting practices. Approving its long distance application to foster competition will extend affordable telephone service options to needy consumers in Georgia and Louisiana.

Sincerely,



Hilary O. Shelton
Director

cc: Chairman Michael K. Powell
Commissioner Kathleen Q. Abernathy
Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Kevin J. Martin
Janice Myles, Common Carrier Bureau
Qualex International